KEEPING SUMMER BREEZY AND FUN

Safety First

*S*ummer is a great time to get outside, be more physically active and enjoy various exciting seasonal activities and events. Like so many things, however, you can sometimes get too much of a good thing — too much sun, too much heat, too many bugs. Always put safety first and take the necessary precautions for a safe and enjoyable summer.

Heat Safety

Have a plan

A big part of staying safe in the heat is having a good plan. Have a rough idea of how long you will be out in the sun and the heat, and then plan accordingly. Protect your eyes and skin and stay covered (wearing loose-fitting clothing, a wide-brimmed hat, sunglasses, etc.) and stay hydrated.

Moderating your exposure to heat goes beyond reapplying sunscreen and covering up. You will want to take extra steps to avoid being outside for long periods in the sun and heat, especially during the peak hours of strongest ultraviolet (UV) rays, during the hours of 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. In the hottest summer months, you will want to pay special attention that by 10 a.m. or 11 a.m., the morning heat may already be more taxing for the body than you might realize.

If possible, make sure that you have an air conditioned oasis where you can take refuge, so that you can get a break from the intense heat. In fact, having access to air conditioning is the number one protective factor for heat-related illnesses, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Stay hydrated

Dehydration is another safety concern during the summer months. Be sure to drink enough liquids throughout the day, as our bodies can lose a lot of water through perspiration when it gets hot out. Drinking plenty of water — even beyond the goal of having eight-8 oz. glasses of water — can be part of good nutrition, too. Snacking on water-rich foods like raw fruits and vegetables can also help keep you hydrated.

Without enough fluids, you may experience dehydration. Look for these signs:

- Extreme thirst

- Dry mouth
- Headache
- Muscle cramping
- Feeling lightheaded
- Foggy thinking

The remedy for dehydration is to slowly reintroduce fluids to the body. Take your time, though, because gulping down water can cause stomach distress. Also, try to avoid alcoholic beverages, because they can ultimately add to your dehydration.

Handle with care

Keep an eye out for those most vulnerable to the effects of extreme heat. Be especially conscious of young children, older adults and pets that all tend to be more susceptible to the complications from dehydration and too much sun and heat. And, never leave children, older adults or pets in a car on a hot day — even with the windows cracked.

Danger zone

While most of the times you'll only experience little to no effect from being out in the sun and the heat, there may be circumstances where you'll need help. Here are a few situations to look out for:

Heat cramps

Dehydration can cause heat cramps, which are painful muscle spasms — usually in the legs and abdomen. Try to massage the muscle and start slowly consuming more liquid. If the person feels sick to his or her stomach or vomits, phone a medical provider immediately.

Heat exhaustion

Heat exhaustion is a serious condition caused by overexposure to hot weather conditions. A person with heat exhaustion usually feels weak and is perspiring heavily, while the skin tends to be cold and clammy. It's important to get a person experiencing heat exhaustion out of the heat and preferably to an air conditioned area. You can give him or her sips of water to start the rehydration process, but if the person has fainted or vomited, seek immediate medical help.

Heatstroke (or sunstroke)

Unlike with heat exhaustion, people experiencing heatstroke have hot dry skin and a high body temperature — and they often have stopped sweating. Heatstroke requires immediate medical attention. You should phone emergency medical services by calling 9-1-1 and following the instructions that they give you. Do not give a person you suspect of having heatstroke any fluids.

Sun Safety

*P*rotecting the eyes and skin from the sun is an essential part of good health. You can still have fun in the sun; you just have to put on a little protection first.

It's just smart

The skin is the body's largest organ. It protects against cold, heat, sunlight, injury, and infection. Yet, some of us don't consider the necessity of caring for and protecting our skin. The need to protect your skin from the sun has become very clear over the years, supported by several studies linking overexposure to the sun with skin cancer. The harmful ultraviolet rays from both the sun and indoor tanning "sunlamps" can cause many other complications besides skin cancer—such as eye problems, a weakened immune system, age spots, wrinkles, and unsightly skin.

How to protect your skin

There are some simple, everyday steps you can take to safeguard your skin from the harmful effects of UV radiation from the sun.

Wear protective clothing

Wearing clothing that will protect your skin from the harmful ultraviolet (UV) rays is very important. Protective clothing can include hats with large brims, UV-resistant sunglasses, long-sleeved shirts, and long pants. You can fall victim to sun damage any time of year—even on a cloudy day—so dress for UV protection all year round.

oidAvoid the burn

Sunburns significantly increase one's lifetime risk of developing skin cancer. It is especially important that children be shielded from any overexposure to the sun that might lead to burns.

Go for the shade

Stay out of the sun, if possible, between the peak burning hours, which, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO), are between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. You can head for the shade, or make your own shade with protective clothing - including a broad-brimmed hat, for example.

Use extra caution when near reflective surfaces

Water, snow, sand, even the windows of a building can reflect the damaging rays of the sun. That can increase your chance of sunburn, even if you're in what you consider a shady spot.

Use extra caution when at higher altitudes

You can experience more UV exposure at higher altitudes, because the thinner air means there are fewer atmospheric elements that typically absorb and reflect UV radiation. That's why people can get sunburned—especially on their faces—while skiing in the winter months.

Apply broad-spectrum sunscreen

Generously apply broad-spectrum sunscreen to cover all exposed skin. The "broad spectrum" variety protects against overexposure to ultraviolet A (UVA) and ultraviolet B (UVB) rays. The FDA recommends using sunscreens that are not only broad spectrum, but that also have a sun protection factor (SPF) value of 15 or higher for protection against sun-induced skin problems.

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Re-apply broad-spectrum sunscreen throughout the day

Even if a sunscreen is labeled as "water-resistant," it must be reapplied throughout the day, especially after sweating or swimming. To be safe, apply sunscreen at a rate of one ounce every two hours. Depending on how much of the body needs coverage, a full-day (six-hour) outing could require one whole tube of sunscreen.

When to protect your skin

UV rays are their strongest from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Cover up with sunscreen and protective clothing and seek shade during those times to ensure the least amount of harmful UV radiation exposure. Apply sunscreen to all exposed skin at least 20 minutes before going outside—particularly during those peak hours of sunlight. Reapply every two hours after swimming or sweating, even on cloudy days.

Protecting your eyes

UV rays can also penetrate the structures of your eyes and cause cell damage. According to the CDC, some of the more common sun-related vision problems include cataracts, macular degeneration, and pterygium (non-cancerous growth of the conjunctiva that can obstruct vision). Think of your eyes and remember to wear:

Wide-brimmed hat

To protect your vision, wear a wide-brimmed hat that keeps your face and eyes shaded from the sun at most angles.

Wrap-around style sunglass with UV block

Effective sunglasses should block glare, block 99 to 100% of UV rays, and have a wraparound shape to protect eyes from most angles.

Using the UV index

When planning your outdoor activities, you can decide how much sun protection you need by checking the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) UV index. This index measures the daily intensity of UV rays from the sun on a scale of 1 to 11. A low UV index requires minimal protection, whereas a high UV index requires maximum protection.

Water Safety

Keeping everyone safe and sound while you enjoy frolicking in the water takes a little extra effort, but it's certainly worth it. Remember to always have adult supervision for children. Whether they're in the pool or playing in the sand at the seashore, having someone who can help them — should an emergency arise — is essential.

Swimming is an enjoyable way to both cool off and get some exercise. Water safety should be of prime importance and safety precautions should be taken to avoid injuries or accidents:

- Always supervise children when they're around water.
- It's always a good idea to use the buddy system when swimming — safer than swimming alone.
- Ensure that people who have difficulty swimming wear life jackets for boating and other water-related activities.

Eye Safety

Take the eye-safety quiz on the right-hand column of this page to check your summer eye safety awareness.

When to wear protective eyewear

The Occupational Safety Health Administration (OSHA) has standards that require employers to provide their workers with the appropriate eye protection. According to these standards, you (or anyone who is watching you do work) should always wear properly fitted eye protective gear, such as safety glasses with side protection/shields, when:

- Doing work that may produce particles, slivers, or dust from materials like wood, metal, plastic, cement, and drywall
- Hammering, sanding, grinding, or doing masonry work.
- Working with power tools
- Working with chemicals, such as common household chemicals including ammonia, oven cleaners, and bleach
- Using a lawnmower, riding mower, or other motorized gardening devices such as string trimmers (also called "weed whackers" or "weed whips")
- Working with wet or powdered cement
- Welding (which requires extra protection like a welding mask or helmet to avoid exposure to sparks and UV radiation)
- "Jumping" the battery of a motor vehicle
- Being a bystander to any of the above

Sports eye safety

It's also recommended that you protect your eyes from injury when participating in certain summer sports, including:

- Riding or being a passenger on a motorcycle

- Indoor racket sports
- Paintball
- Baseball
- Cycling
- Basketball

Sports Safety

An important part of summer sports safety is prevention. There's a tendency to say to ourselves, "Oh, I can do that," which in many cases we can, but not without the possibility of injury. It helps to be conditioned to the activities in which we're preparing to engage.

Warming and stretching

One thing that helps prepare the body for action is warming the muscles and joints through slow and steady movements that ready you for the types of movement that you'll be performing. For example, if you'll be doing a sport or activity that mainly requires your leg muscles, you can take a brisk 10-minute walk or jog in place to gets the blood flowing to your lower body. Once the body is warmed up, you can do some gentle stretches for the muscles and joints that you'll be using.

Gearing up

Another consideration for summer sports safety is protective gear. If you are biking, roller skating, skateboarding, rafting, or taking part in any activity where you might be traveling at high speeds, always make sure you wear a helmet and other protective gear. Also, wear protective gear if you're engaging in activities where you may slip or fall, like rock climbing. Don't forget reflective clothing and lights for nighttime running and biking.

Go with a buddy

It's probably smarter to avoid doing some riskier activities alone, like swimming, surfing, rock climbing, etc. So, be sure to have someone there who can call for help. There's nothing like having backup from a buddy when you need it most.

Cooling down

Don't forget to give your body a cool-down period after any physical activity — especially if it's something intense or vigorous, like many summer sports activities. Do some gentle stretches for the larger muscles groups — legs, back, chest, shoulders, and arms. Make sure you take deep, relaxing breaths throughout your stretching routine and hold each stretch about 30 seconds or more.

Reap the Rewards of Summer Safety

Think safety first for all summertime fun. This gives you the reward of peace of mind while enjoying the beauty of the season and its many pleasant activities.